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ABSTRACT

To develop young readers who will continue to read throughout life, reading must be taught in a context that encourages students to read and to love reading. Teachers, parents, and librarians can lead students into books through a variety of strategies. Adults can awaken youngsters' imaginations by reading aloud, introducing books by means of book talks, puppetry, drama, singing, storytelling, and participatory responses. Puppets are excellent for beginning creative dramatics. Children can make their own puppets, design a puppet theater, and dramatize the stories. Through storytelling and other oral language activities, students' language skills can be extended. Experiences which make a story come alive can draw students into books and provide the basis for a genuine love of reading. (A 22-item book list with grade recommendations is attached.) (NKA)

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USING THEATRE ARTS TO EXTEND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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USING THEATRE ARTS TO EXTEND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Introduction

The major goal of reading programs is to develop READERS who not only can read but who do READ and who will continue to READ throughout life. To accomplish this goal, students must have ample opportunities to read good literature. Certainly skills are important, but skills alone will not get the job done. They must be taught in a context that encourages students to READ and to love READING.

Good literature educates the imagination, provides language models and molds the intellect. Experiences which make a story come alive and draw students into books can provide the basis for a genuine love of reading.

Teachers, parents, and librarians can lead students into books through a variety of strategies. We can awaken their imaginations by reading aloud, introducing books by means of booktalks, puppetry, drama, singing, storytelling, and particistory responses.

The purpose of this paper is to encourage teachers, parents, and librarians to utilize the theatre arts to extend children's literature.

USING THEATRE ARTS TO EXTEND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Many young children act like reading by parroting phrases from favorite stories and poems. However, the first step in becoming a "REAL READER" is hearing good stories and enjoying them.

Too often, we take classic story patterns for granted. But they offer rich possibilities for reading readiness, for instruction in English as a second language and for enticing older students into real books. Who among us can ever forget:

"Little pig, little pig
Let me come in."
"No, no, by the hair
of my chinny, chin, chin."

Children grab on to such phrases and drive us to distraction with gleeful repetition. But in repeating phrases, children are learning that words are for using, for playing with, for giving pleasure. When children find rhythm in words, they have a reason to learn to read and to keep reading.

Models of language that have repeating patterns and dependable lines help them develop predictive skills in reading.

Big Books, oversize versions of popular stories or poems, made and illustrated, are a marvelous tool to inspire the love of reading and extending literature. The Big Books allow all the students to see the print as the teacher reads. Use a pizza box (turn inside-out), decorate and make a book box resource kit for each big book. Plan follow-up activities for independent learning and group practice. Utilize puppets for motivators. List key words on the

back cover of the books and provide a pocket to hold word cards for matching, building sentences, etc.

Examples:

The Very Hungry Caterpillar, (Carle, 1983)

The Great Big Enormous Turnip, (Tolstoy, 1971)

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, (Martin, 1970)

If you Give a Mouse a Cookie, (Numeroff, 1985)

Puppets are excellent for beginning creative dramatics. Children who are shy take part readily when allowed to "let the puppet do the acting." They can make their own puppets, design a puppet theater, and dramatize the stories.

The use of drama motivates kids to read. It is a process for teaching imagery, characterization, and enhancing literacy experience.

Children benefit from reading stories aloud and from acting out dramatic narrations, whether at home or at school. Encourage students to retell and dramatize their favorite fairy tales using stick puppets. "The Four Musicians," "Three Billy Goats Gruff," and "The Three Little Pigs," are among children's favorites.

Drama calls on the creativity of children and makes learning fun. It provides the opportunity to develop positive attitudes about books.

Children immersed in King Bidgood's in the Bathtub (Wood, 1985), repeating:

"Help! Help! cried the Page when the sun came up,
King Bidgood's in the bathtub and he won't get out," or

Henny Penny, Ducky Lucky, Turkey Lurkey chanting:

"Oh, we are going to tell the king that the sky is
falling,"

are absorbing the language of literature.

If children are to become readers, they must come to know that books have form, structure, style. Books contain a special language; they aren't just talk written down. In real life, do we say?

"I am the Gingerbread Boy.

I am, I am . . . . . ."

Such words have power, a power children recognize and respond to.

Well-loved books can be adapted into plays by students.

Examples:

The Runaway Bunny, (Brown, 1977) or Gertrude the Goose Who Forgot, (Galdone, 1971) could be adapted by the younger students. A Dog Called Kitty, (Wallace, 1980) or Sarah, Plain and Tall, (MacLachan, 1986) are popular with the older students.

Writing scripts and dramatizing the stories provide students with experiences in analysis of characters, plots, and comparisons. More positive attitudes, self-expression, and acceptance of others are also enhanced when students are involved with story dramatization.

Motivating students through the works of students' authors, "PARTICI-STORY," other techniques, strategies, and easy-to-make-and-find-teaching props can be used to involve students in booktalks and storytelling.

Create a bonnet and apron when sharing Amelia Bedelia's Books, (Parish). A "slinky" covered with fabric will make a boa for the book, The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash, (Noble, 1980). Props and puppets used with booktalks help make books come alive.

Storytelling delights children. Some of our greatest literature came down from generation to generation by oral interpretation. It brings a dimension

of warmth and love to the classroom. Once a story is told it becomes a living experience in students' minds.

A good story does more than merely please the listener. Through storytelling and other oral language activities, a student's skills in language are extended. Also, it introduces them to cultural values and literary traditions before they can read, write, and talk about stories by themselves.

Teachers and librarians have a repertoire at their fingertips for storytelling. Teeny Tiny, (Bennett, 1985); Aesop's Fables and those by Arnold Lobel are easily adapted by young children. Older students will enjoy Stone Fox, (Gardiner, 1980); Dear Mili, (Manheim, 1988); and Fables by James Thurber. Students are neither bored nor alienated by learning literature through storytelling.

Music and storytelling go together because singing is a celebration of language. Use singing with I Know an Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly, (Westcott, 1980). Music is so natural for children.

The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything, (Williams, 1985) brings a student's whole body into the story. Students enjoy the physical action and the refrains are fun.

For special days in celebrating "Grandparents Day," tell the story "The Wooden Bowl" adapted by Domenico Vittorini. The students will sympathize with Grandfather. Involve them in telling a story about their grandparents. Even students with low motivation and weak academic skills are more likely to listen, read, write, and work hard in the context of storytelling. It can ignite the imaginations, giving them a taste of where books can take them.

BOOK LIST

Title	Author	Grade Recommendation
Amelia Bedelia	Peggy Parish	K-4
Brown Bear, Brown Bear	Bill Martin	K-3
Indian Two Feet and His Horse	Margaret Friskey	K-3
What Do You Do With a Kangaroo?	Mercer Mayer	K-4
Crocodile Beat	Gail Jorgensen	K-4
The Scarebird	Sid Fleischman	3-6
The Great Big Enormous Turnip	Alexei Tolstoy	K-3
If You Give a Mouse a Cookie	Laura Joffe Numeroff	K-4
King Bidgood's in the Bathtub	Audrey Wook	K-4
The Runaway Bunny	Margaret Brown	K-3
Gertrude the Goose Who Forgot	Paul Galdone	K-3
Teeny Tiny	Jill Bennett	K-2
The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything	Linda Williams	K-4
I Know an Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly	Nadine Bernard Westcott	K-3
The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash	Trinka Hakes Noble	3-6
Dear Mili	Ralph Manheim	K-6
Stone Fox	John R. Gardiner	2-6
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry	Mildred D. Taylor	3-6
The Great Gilly Hopkins	Katherine Paterson	3-6
Sarah, Plain and Tall	Patricia MacLachlan	2-5
A Dog Called Kitty	Bill Wallace	2-5
A Taste of Blackberries	Doris Smith	3-6